

Atlantis: A Statement of the "Atlantic" Theory Respecting Aboriginal Civilization

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from: 'The Cincinnati Quarterly Journal of Science', Vol. II, No. 3, July 1875, p. 193-211 (source: Cincinnati History Library and Archives)

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The age in which we live is preeminently one of experimental investigation. Men are no longer content to accept theories unless founded upon a basis of fact amounting almost to positive demonstration. But while modern methods of practical investigation have so enlarged the boundaries of physical science, it is hardly probable that human effort will ever be able to dispel entirely the obscurity which enshrouds the primitive history of man. Yet the labors of the archaeologist and geologist have not been altogether in vain. Much has been done in our own time to clear away the undergrowth of preconceived error, and admit the sunlight of truth into the dark regions of superstition and tradition.

The same critical and experimental spirit which has effected so marvelous a change in natural science within a comparatively brief period, while it has upset many cherished beliefs and exploded many phlogistic theories, has given us clearer conceptions of the condition and development of man within the historic period, and proved his existence long anterior to received dates. Indeed it would appear to be satisfactorily established, that man was co-tenant of the earth with extinct mammals of geologic periods; and it seems not improbable that his occupancy of the earth will be still further antedated. But while the prying curiosity of our age has shattered many false theories, it is not without value, also, in rescuing truth from the clutches of error and in establishing that as true which had long been

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regarded as false. Wendell Phillips, in his interesting lecture on the "Lost Arts," illustrates this point by an anecdote of Archimedes, of whom it is said that when the ships of the enemy besieging Syracuse drew away from the levers he had arranged to pry them out of water, he turned upon them the sun's rays focalized by concave mirrors, and thus set fire to them. This story, so long discredited on account of its alleged physical impossibility, he shows to be true, so far, at least, as this objection to its truth is concerned, by an experiment of certain French scientists who succeeded in fusing lead at the distance of three hundred feet by the same means.

Again, the long disputed existence of Troy, outside of the glowing periods of Homer, seems to be now satisfactorily demonstrated by the researches of Dr. Schliemann, which have not only laid bare the foundations of Ilium's once lofty towers, but show that they were themselves reared upon the debris of a civilization old when Troy was born -- a civilization unknown to history and lost even to tradition.

Recent discoveries, also demonstrate the truth of the traditional history of Rome current among the educated classes of the capital during the Augustan age. Explorations conducted at the expense of the late Emperor of the French, and of the Russian government, during the last twenty years, show that even in the time of the Kings, Rome was a fortified city of great importance and immense population. The wall of Romulus, so long considered a myth like the suckling wolf, is disclosed to view, corresponding in detail with the description given by Dionysius of Halicarnassus -- the stones composing it being each a "cart load," and so described in the technique of the Roman masons to-day.

But in Egypt the most interesting results of modern archaeological investigation have been achieved, and these relate more nearly to the subject of our present discussion. On the banks of the mysterious Nile, the patient labors of Auguste Mariette, formerly a Lieutenant of French Engineers, have been crowned with a success which sets at rest many heretofore doubtful points, and, besides, opens to us new lines of historical and ethnological inquiry.

"Unwearied digging," says Bayard Taylor, "has enabled Mariette to reach the records of the ancient empire, and to show -- what we never before suspected -- that the glory of Egyptian art belongs to the age of Rameses II. (Sesostris). Not only the art, but the culture, the political organization of Egypt, are carried back to the third dynasty, (4,450 B. C.) and Menes, the first historic king, dawns upon our knowledge, not as a primitive barbarian, but as the result of a long stage of unrecorded development. I do not hesitate to say, that since

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Champollion discovered the key to the hieroglyphics, no scholar has thrown such a broad and clear light upon Egyptian life and history as Mariette." *Scholars have universally discredited the antiquity claimed by the early Egyptian priesthood for their nation and civilization; but the researches of Mariette, so far as they extend, corroborate the chronological table of the priest Manetho back to a period 5,000 years B. C. when the art remains indicate a proficiency equaled at no later date, and clearly "the result of a long stage of unrecorded development." Archaeological inquiry upon the remains scattered over this continent has reached, as yet, no definite or satisfactory result. Thus far the interpretation of these records of antiquity has practically baffled the closest scrutiny. Yet whoever attempts to unravel the mystery in which the history and ethnology of the builders of the ancient mound-structures of this continent are involved, can hardly fail to become satisfied:*

1. That the Mound Builders and the ancient inhabitants of Mexico and Central America were substantially one people, partaking of the same culture; and
2. That the earliest civilization of tropical America, so far as we can comprehend it through the medium of the Aztec and kindred races, presents features which negative the supposition of indigenous and unaided growth.

In view of these conclusions in which investigators have very generally concurred, the inquiry naturally arises, whence obtained these ancient nations these peculiar features of their civilization? Leaving out of view the claim, so strongly urged half a century ago, respecting the original unity and subsequent dispersion of the human race, by which all analogies between ancient civilizations were sought to be explained, as a fact removed by modern investigation to a period of human history too remote to enter as a profitable element into present consideration, we may inquire what evidence, if any, exists, to show that the early American civilization was influenced by external communication.

In response to this inquiry, our attention has been at various times directed by classic antiquaries to the tradition of the Atlantic isles, narrated by Plato in the Timaeus as received by Solon from the Egyptian priests of the Delta, during a visit thither by the Athenian law-giver. These priests, as we are informed by Plato, claimed for their country and race a great antiquity, with written records extending back 8,000 years, and traditions of events 1,000 years earlier. "These writings," said they to Solon, "relate what a prodigious force

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your city (Athens) once overcame, when a mighty, warlike power, rushing from the Atlantic sea, spread itself with hostile fury over all Europe and Asia. That sea, indeed, was navigable, and had an island fronting that mouth, which you, in your tongue, call the 'Pillars of Hercules'; and this island was larger than Lybia (Africa) and Asia (Minor) put together, and there was a passage for travelers of that day to the rest of the islands, as well

as from these islands to the whole opposite continent"--(or, more literally, the continent beyond) "*that surrounds the real sea. For as respects what is within the mouth here mentioned*" (i. e: the Mediterranean) -- "*it appears to be a bay with a kind of narrow entrance; and that sea is indeed a true sea, and the land that entirely surrounds it may truly and most correctly be termed a continent. In this Atlantic island there was formed a powerful league of kings, who subdued the entire island, together with many others, and parts, also, of the continent; besides which, they subjected to their rule the inland parts of Lybia as far as Egypt, and Europe as far as Tyrrhoenia (Italy). The whole of this force then being collected together in one league, undertook to enslave both your country and ours, and the land besides which lies within the mouth. *** Subsequently, however, through violent earthquakes and deluges, which brought desolation in a single day and night, the whole of this warlike race was at once merged under the earth; and the Atlantic island was itself buried beneath the sea and entirely disappeared; whence now that sea is neither navigable, nor to be traced out, being blocked up by the great depth of mud which the subsiding island produced.*"

Plato evidently regarded this tradition as true, but his modern translators, almost without exception, hold, with Mr. Davis, of King's College, Oxford, that "the whole story of the Atlantic isles is so improbable, and so at variance with the geographical knowledge of the Greeks, even in Plato's time, that it can only be regarded as a mere myth." Other objections have been urged against the truth of this tradition, among which is the suggestion of M. Claparede that the subsidence of so large an area as that of the supposed island would have caused a considerable refrigeration in the climate of the northern hemisphere, with a corresponding change of the fauna and flora of the Mediterranean region, which would have permanently engraved itself upon the "memory of the Egyptians.

Notwithstanding the weight which at first glance would seem justly to attach to these objections, there are, it is claimed, many circumstances which, from an archaeological standpoint at least, are strikingly consistent with the truth of the tradition, and which seem to indicate

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America as the "*continent beyond*" whence "*there was a passage for travelers of that day.*"

In the interpretation of the tradition, it might be said that we should allow something for oriental exaggeration and the imperfect knowledge of the ancient Egyptians respecting the relative dimensions of countries with which they supposed themselves familiar, and should therefore place little stress upon the traditional size of the island lying nearest their territory -- if, indeed, the description: "*larger than Lybia and Asia put together,*" were not in reality intended to apply to the continent, as would seem most natural. Upon the same principle, we may make allowance for the magnitude of the alleged cataclysm in which all trace of the islands and their inhabitants was lost, and suppose it to have been but the subsidence of some smaller islands, perhaps of a volcanic nature, by reason whereof communication with Egypt was cut off. The early navigators, as is well known, had not the means of accomplishing extended voyages in the open sea, except where a chain of islands enabled them to divide their journey into short stages, That this was the mode of intercourse between Egypt and the Atlantic continent, appears from the tradition itself; and we may easily understand how the accounts of such a subsidence, with the accompanying destruction of life, brought to Egypt by terrified mariners, would magnify the event into a terrible cataclysm, the recollection of which would effectually deter further exploration in that quarter for ages.

The reason assigned by the tradition for making no further efforts to ascertain the nature and extent of the alleged catastrophe, namely: that the sea, where the islands had formerly stood, was rendered impassable by great depths of mud, would seem to favor this interpretation, for volcanic scoriae have been known to cover the sea for leagues in extent during and after eruptions, so as to impede navigation for a considerable period.

Again, if we examine the map of the Atlantic ocean we shall discover in the North Atlantic, stretching to the westward of Europe and North Africa, the outline of a vast island represented by the conventional marks designating a swamp or shoal. It is called the Sargasso sea, and is generally avoided by ships on account of the great quantity of sea-weed there collected. The depth of this sea varies from one thousand to ten thousand feet. The late Edward Forbes conceived that this weed first grew on an old coast line, since submerged, forming the western extremity of Europe and North Africa, and extending far into the Atlantic. Sir Charles Lyell, on the other hand, combats this view, and attributes the collection of sea weed in

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that locality solely to the action of ocean currents by which it is transported from the tropics.

Without presuming to determine whether in fact the Sargassosea or shoal is a subsided island or an eddy of the ocean, it is sufficient for the purposes at hand to observe that in the spot designated by the Atlantic tradition, there exists and has existed for an indefinite period an impediment to navigation which may by fair intendment relieve the ancient Egyptians and Greeks of the geographical ignorance imputed to them.

Besides this tradition, however, there are other allusions to the Atlantic isles in the writings of Plato and other classic authors. According to Diodorus, the Gardens of the Hesperides and the Atlantic islands were the same, whereof the soil was fruitful, diversified with mountains and pleasant vales, and pleasure gardens planted with divers [diverse] sorts of trees, and with towns adorned with stately buildings and banqueting houses in the midst of orchards.

The nebulous "Elysian Fields" were situated in the same favored spot. From these and kindred associations the name Atlas was itself derived -- the personification of navigation and the conquest of the sea by mercantile enterprise. In classic mythology he was said to have descended from Ocean and married Hesperis, or the West, and from their union sprang the Atlantidae, who inhabited the islands bearing their name. Homer calls him "*one who knows all the depths of the sea*" and "*who keeps the pillars which hold Heaven and earth asunder*" -- in allusion to the "*Pillars of Hercules*," or, possibly, to the Atlas mountains on the west coast of Africa which, to the Egyptians and other early navigators of the Mediterranean, were a familiar sight upon the western horizon where the earth and sky met.

Ovid calls him "King of the remotest West"; rich in flocks and herds, and master of the tree bearing golden apples. Hesiod, also, speaks of Atlas as neighbor to the Hesperian nymphs. Antaeus, son of Atlas, who founded Tangier upon the African shore of the Straits of Gibraltar, is related to have sent abroad for assistance to resist the attacks of Hercules, and also to have received new strength from his parent as often as he touched the ground; which has been interpreted as alluding to maritime aids received from Atlas that became effective only when they reached the shore. The Cabiri, according to Sanchoniatho, held a tradition that Atlas was buried alive by his brothers, which may bear reference to the cataclysm mentioned by Plato.

Pliny states that there existed, even in his day, vestiges of an ancient population in the ruins of edifices on the Canary Islands; and Herodotus speaks of a tribe called Atlantes living on the west coast

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of Africa, whose modern descendants, the Berbers, are strongly distinguished from the surrounding tribes by their physical appearance and reddish complexion, and language analogous to that of the aboriginal population of the Canaries. Proclus, speaking of certain islands situated in the "*outward sea*," mentions the fact that the inhabitants of one of them--Poseidon--preserved a tradition handed down to them by their ancestors, of the Atlantic island of prodigious magnitude, which had really existed in those seas; and which, during a long period

of time, governed all the islands in the Atlantic ocean, and refers to the Ethiopian history of Marcellus as authority for the statement. Other classic writers attribute to the kings of Atlantis a knowledge of astronomy and the invention of the sphere.

Without multiplying these citations, they tend to show, when taken in connection with the account obtained by Solon in Egypt, that there lingered among the Mediterranean nations, a tradition, more or less distinct, of islands lying in the Atlantic ocean at some far distant period, that were beautiful and fruitful as a garden; rich in flocks and herds; abounding in gold; governed by wise and powerful kings, acquainted with navigation and astronomy; and that after attempting and partially accomplishing the subjugation of the eastern continents, the inhabitants of those islands were, with their country, by convulsions of nature, engulfed in the sea and entirely destroyed; or, if we please, became lost to the knowledge of oriental nations by the subsidence of intermediate islands which had aided the primitive navigation of the time.

Assuming the physical possibility of the tradition being true in substance, we may proceed to briefly review the evidence upon which it is sought to apply the same to the continent of America, in referring our aboriginal civilization to a common source, or an intercourse with the Egyptians and other nations of the East.

The initial point for our consideration is presented by the word Atlantis, or Atlas, which gives name to the great ocean barrier separating the so called New World from the Old. This, we are told, has no satisfactory etymology in any European language. Anthon, it is true derives the word from a intensive, and *rxaw*, to endure -- tracing it, evidently, to the mythological idea of Atlas supporting the heavens. This derivation, however, appears hardly reasonable, since the name would seem to have existed before the duty was imposed upon the god, and was no doubt imported into the Greek through maritime intercourse with the African nations. It is more probable that the original signification of Atlas--king of the Atlantic isles, situated far in the west beyond the Pillars of Hercules--was gradually lost, as

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commerce declined and the tradition of the existence of the islands became indistinct, and was ultimately merged in the secondary idea of "*keeper of the pillars which hold heaven and earth asunder*," which stood upon the western horizon where the eye would naturally turn in looking toward the fabled islands, and thus became crystallized in the mythology of the day. It is, therefore, more reasonable to suppose that the few greek words, and there are but few, which contain the radical *arX* or *rk*, all of them involving the idea of supporting a burden, are themselves derived from this secondary signification of Atlas.

Accepting this, then, as an imported word, foreign to European language, the argument drawn from comparative philology proceeds upon a precedent established by Max Müller. This distinguished philologist traces the locality of Ophir mentioned in the Hebrew bible, in the following ingenious manner. Speaking of the fleet of Tharsish which Solomon had at sea together with the navy of Hiram, and which came once in three years bringing gold, ivory, silver, apes, and peacocks, also gold from Ophir, *algum-trees*, and precious stones, he says:

"A great deal has been written to find out where Ophir really was; but there can be no doubt it was India. The names for apes, peacocks, ivory and algum-trees are foreign words in Hebrew, as much as tobacco or gutta-percha are in English. Now if we wished to know from what part of the world gutta-percha was first imported into England, we might conclude that it came from that country where the name gutta-percha formed part of the spoken language. If, therefore, we can find a language in which the names for peacocks, apes, ivory and algum-trees, which are foreign words in Hebrew, are indigenous, we may be certain that the country in which that language was spoken must be the Ophir of the Bible. That language is no other but Sanskrit;" and India, the learned author concludes, is the land of Ophir; and argues that the vessels of Solomon traded on the coast of Malabar and brought away the products floated down the Indus, a conclusion supported by other considerations as well.

If, therefore, to use the formula of Max Müller, we can find a country, in the spoken language of which the word Atlantis has an indigenous root, there it is said we are justified in seeking traces of the long lost race.

That language was spoken in the lovely vale of Anahuac, at the period of its conquest by the rapacious Spaniard; and tropical America, that land, rich in flocks and herds, beautiful as the Elysian fields, and so abundant in gold, it is hardly oriental hyperbole to say its trees bore golden apples.

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"It is a tropical Switzerland," says a recent writer. "Flanked by two oceans, and rising from both to the rich plateaus of the table lands, Mexico possesses, on both acclivities, all the temperatures of the world, and ranges from the orange and plantain on the sea shore, to eternal ice on the precipices that overhang the higher valleys. Change of climate is attained merely by ascending, and in a region where the country rises steeply, the broad leaved aloe and feathery palm may be seen relieved against the everlasting snow of Popocatepetl. All these delightful climates produce the fruits and flowers of the tropics on the same parallel of latitude that crosses eternal frost; while over all, a never-ending spring bends its cloudless arch. Nor are these the only allurements of this wonderful land; for Nature, as if unsatisfied with pampering the tastes of man by crowding the surface of the earth with everything that might please his appetite or delight his eye, has veined its sterile mountains "with precious ores in exhaustless quantity."

Here, too, we find the radical *tl* or *atl*, one of the commonest roots of the spoken language, entering into numerous words of varied signification, and also existing as a separate word, whose meaning is such as would render it the one most likely to be transmitted to foreign nations through maritime intercourse.

The primary signification of the word in the Nahuatl, or Toltecan, language, was water; from which were derived *Atlan*, on the border or in the midst of water; *Atlaca*, to combat, or, to hurl or dart from the water, with preterit *Atlaz*, and numerous other words of like form, containing the radical in combination.

But an argument drawn from a single philological coincidence, however strong, is hardly sufficient to satisfy a critical mind, unless confirmed by other analogies less general than beauty and fertility of the country, or its wealth in flocks or gold; for we may reasonably assume that an intercourse, however remote, between the primitive inhabitants of Egypt and America would have left some traces in the monuments, traditions and social systems of the latter, which would afford additional evidence of such communication. Besides, the Aztec races, in whose spoken language these words occur, were comparatively recent invaders of Mexico, and the prima-facie presumption would be that their language and customs were also imported, and that such analogies would, therefore, be wholly valueless as circumstantial proof. But, without digressing to answer this objection in detail, it may be said, generally, that those who have most carefully investigated the subject, including Baron Humboldt, agree that the Aztec civilization was founded upon the more elevated and refined systems of the earlier races whom these invaders supplanted, and that

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the civil and religious polity which they enjoyed was mainly the result of ages of growth among the nations who preceded them. The case is not without familiar parallels in history, illustrating the vitality of civilization, especially when conquered amid the physical monuments of its culture. The survival of the fittest is shown in the history of our own tongue, and such may have been, by parity of reasoning, the fate of the early American language, which would have survived, in great measure, the destruction of all other attainments. To repeat, what seems an apt figure, the page presented to us by the Archaeology of tropical America, must be regarded in the light of a palimpsest, which, beneath the rude characters inscribed by the Aztec, retains, nevertheless, the impress of a higher and more refined civilization. Viewing this culture, then, in its general aspects, eliminat- ing

those features evidently engrafted upon it by the barbarism of its conquerors, and regarding it as a creature of indigenous growth in the spot where it first became known to Europeans, it is claimed to possess characteristics so analogous to the ancient systems of the Mediterranean nations, as to offer legitimate ground for inferring communication at a period when the latter had long emerged from primitive conditions, and established well defined dogmas of culture and religious belief.

It is manifestly impossible within present limits to take more than a cursory view of these points of comparison. The ancient Mexicans, like the Egyptians, are chiefly known to us through those enduring monuments which are the memorials of their former greatness. Scattered through the secluded valleys and crowning the picturesque heights of tropical America, are the moss-covered ruins of temples and palaces which excite the admiration and wonder of the beholder, at the proficiency in the arts of masonry and sculpture which they display. Such architectural ornamentation evidences *"a long stage of unrecorded development."* *"In the monuments,"* says an eloquent essayist, *"we have the human deposit of the ages the truth of the historic past. Architecture, in this view, is the geology of humanity. Ceasing its testimony at the present surface of the globe, geology tells nothing of that subsequent history which commences with the existence of man; here architecture resumes the thread of the narrative and bears witness of that compound existence to which it owes its origin. That consecutiveness which is dimly descried in documents, in architecture is apparent; that human progress which all believe, but which so few show forth distinctly, is beautifully narrated in the monumental series."*

In both Egypt and America the pyramid represents the highest

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attainment in architectural form. In both it is the prominent and pervading feature of the monumental remains. The American pyramidal structures, like those of Egypt, in most cases faced the cardinal points, and many of the temples and sacred places were alike surrounded by walls of earth or stone. The pyramids were often approached by elevated causeways, and the temples were located in the vicinity of water which was used in sacred services.

Concerning analogies traceable in mere architectural forms, Humboldt remarks that they *"prove very little in favor of intercommunication between people, for, under all zones, men have indulged in rhythmic repetitions of the same forms."* This remark is quoted by Brantz Mayer, and supplemented with an intimation that such forms are controlled by climatic or geological necessities rather than by art. If this be true, we should seek the origin of the pyramid, as developed in Mexico, in the volcanic character of a region where the largest base in proportion to height is required to resist the shock of earthquakes.

But how will this avail us in tracing the same development in the valley of the Nile? If we are prepared to accept the conclusions of the Astronomer-Royal of Scotland (C. Piazzi Smith), ascribing to the great pyramid of Ghizeh the character of a great original, built by a different race from the Egyptians, and which served them as a model for their later and inferior structures, the solution of the problem is easy. He thinks it not improbable that the science fossilized in the great pyramid originated with a now extinct race, who inhabited islands once existing in the South-Atlantic Ocean, but makes no allusion to the Atlantic tradition.

While it may be true that evidence of analogy in mere architectural forms would be inadmissible--to use a legal phrase--as not of itself tending to prove an intercommunication between nations; yet, it is claimed, that when a foundation is laid by a distinct tradition of such communication, such evidence becomes not only admissible but highly important. And it may be remarked in connection, that Humboldt nowhere mentions the Atlantic tradition, and it does not appear that his attention ever was called to it. But it is not alone the mere coincidence of form that offers analogy in the architectural monuments of Egypt and America. Their general spirit and uses were in many cases identical. Modern investigations establish the well known form of three stages or terraces, surmounted by a temple, as common on both sides of the Atlantic.

In the general ideas of ornamentation, as delineated in sculpture, there may be likewise traced many striking coincidences. At Copan, on a stone obelisk were chiseled human figures with caps on

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their heads, sandals on their feet, with garments reaching half way down the thigh. On the tablets of an altar were sculptured sixteen human figures in low relief, sitting cross-legged upon cushions with fans in their hands. At the same place were colossal stone figures with heads of animals and bodies of men. All of these, it must be admitted, strongly suggest the Egyptian style, not only in the mode of presentation, but in the selection of subjects. Crouching figures of animals in the similitude of the Sphinx; human heads showing the Egyptian mode of head-dress with singular fidelity; serpents in conventional form, and numerous other works of minor importance, are cited as exhibiting such resemblances to Egyptian art.

But, before passing from the art remains to other features of the early American culture, one noble monument is worthy of remark, no less from the varied and graceful forms delineated in its exterior ornamentation -- which are said to strongly resemble, and indeed, far surpass, many specimens of Etruscan art -- than that in its elevation the pyramidal form is reversed.

The edifice at Mitla rests upon a solid pyramidal base or pedestal of brick, five feet in height, encased with slabs of dressed stone. From this base, the walls of the main structure incline outward and attain a height of twenty-five feet. The ground plan of these ruins resembles the Greek cross, and seems to have once included three other structures like the one which now remains, enclosing a square interior court paved with cement. Three of the interior walls of the existing edifice, covered with a hard and highly polished cement, contain horizontal recesses of sufficient size for the reception of a human body. Each wall contains nine of these compartments, arranged in three tiers. The exterior finish of the walls is also in three tiers or courses of stone, divided into rectangular panels, corresponding with the interior recesses, making, however, sixty-three panels in all in the exterior faces -- the ground plan of the building being in the form of the letter T. The exterior stonework is of the most accurate character. Each of the sixty-three divisions or panels is a recess cut into the solid stone, and contains geometric figures in a mosaic of small blocks of stone, set in high relief in a mass of enduring cement, forming numerous designs of great beauty and regularity.

*"The spectator," says Brantz Mayer, "who looks at one end of this singular building, ** might almost fancy that he stood in front of a gigantic sarcophagus, designed and sculptured in advanced periods of Grecian and Roman art."*

Beneath the paved central area once enclosed by these edifices, are said to exist subterranean apartments, similarly ornamented by

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mosaics of stone. The entire structure, so far as we can judge by those remains which have survived the ages, was intended as a place of interment -- a gigantic sarcophagus, at once suggestive of the rock sculptured tombs of the Egyptians, with ornamentation of Grecian art. In intellectual culture, and in certain general features of social organization, the resemblances between the ancient nations, are claimed to be equally striking. In both Egypt and America the occupations of the people were designated in earliest infancy, and the education of youth moulded accordingly. While the "caste" distinction of Egypt was not so sharply defined among the Mexicans, yet priests, warriors, artisans, farmers, and traders, were, nevertheless, separated by defined limits. Among both nations the priestly classes were numerous and powerful, living apart from the community in convents, and were curators of learning, especially versed in astronomy, exercising an important influence in the administration of the state.

In the peculiar features of their religion and mythology, many points, of resemblance are indicated as showing a transmission of religious ideas between the two nations, or, at least, a common origin of religious belief. Of these, only a few can be here mentioned. Similarly to the Mediterranean nations, the Mexicans believed in many deities presiding over special affairs of men; also in the existence of spirits inferior to the gods, who controlled minor concerns, and of whom each family had a number of images or penates, according to rank. Athor of the Egyptians, and Astarte of the Syrians, have their counterpart, it is claimed, in Tetevinan, "*Mother of the Gods*," in Mexican mythology. The tradition of Quetzal, is compared with that of Isis and Osiris, who first showed the Egyptians the use of wheat and barley, made implements of husbandry and taught their use, gave them laws, civil organization, marriage, and worship, and, finally, after teaching these arts, assembled a host, and went into all the world, conquering nations by music and eloquence. In the Mexican theogony, Quetzal was a great benefactor who came from the east, and after teaching the arts of peace and civilization, departed again to the far east in a vessel, promising one day to return -- a promise which led the Mexicans to fall an easy prey to the covetous Spaniard whom they regarded as descended from their god. In the Mexican doctrines of the future life, there is also to be traced a general resemblance, to the Egyptian theories. Among both nations, the doctrine of the future state was well established, and closely connected with astronomy. Both believed in a partial transmigration of souls, and, therefore, bestowed but little care upon the dwellings of the living, which to them were temporary;

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but upon the tombs of the dead, especially of the great, they bestowed great care and expense, as fitting for their permanent abodes. According to the Egyptian belief, after the soul finally departed from the body, it began its transmigration through inferior animals, lasting 3,000 years, when it again entered a human body. Among the Mexicans, a similar belief led to similar results. Religious works and tombs alone remain to attest the zeal of the builders. They held the immortality of the soul, and three places of abode therefor -- the sun, wherein dwelt the spirits of nobles, soldiers killed in battle, and women dying in labor. (A similar belief was held by nearly all the Indian tribes in the vicinity of the Mexican Gulf.) The happy dwellers of the sun could after a time revisit the earth and animate clouds, birds, and animals, and revisit the sun at will. Those killed by lightning, disease, or drowning, went in spirit to a cool, shady place called Tlalocan, where feasts and pleasure awaited them. All others were at death consigned to Mictlantocli, kingdom of Mictlan, god of hell, a dark and gloomy place in the center of the earth.

In comparing the ancient astronomical culture of oriental and American nations, we enter upon a field of which but a passing glance must here suffice. This knowledge both Humboldt and Prescott assign the first rank as a distinguishing feature of the American aboriginal civilization, and both likewise frankly admit the difficulty of "*considering, as the result of observations made by a nation of mountaineers in the uncultivated regions of the new continent.*" "*They measured the length of the tropical year with a precision unknown to the philosophers of antiquity,*" -- says Prescott. The day with the American as with the Egyptian and many Asiatic nations, began at sunrise. The civil year was a solar year of 365 days divided into 18 months of twenty days each, and five complementary days. Besides the civil calendar, the priests made use of a lunar calendar by whose mysteries the festivals were regulated with great exactitude.

Thirteen of the Mexican years formed a cycle, four a "ligature," and two of the latter an "old age" -- all of which (excepting the latter) were expressed by appropriate symbols. The half century of 52 years, was represented by a wheel surrounded by a serpent, with its tail in its mouth, and four knots signifying the four indictions or cycles. A similar symbol among the Egyptians indicated a century. The names and hieroglyphics of the Mexican months, all relate to the festivals, public works, and climate of Mexico and nothing in their etymology indicates birth in a more northerly climate. Humboldt admitted the indigenous character of this branch of Mexican culture, so far as influenced by those purely Asiatic ideas by him attributed to the Aztec migrations.

In every 52 years, thirteen days were intercalated, which is the same in effect as the addition in the Julian calendar of 1 day every four years, and consequently fixes the length of the year at 365 days 6 hours. The Persians intercalated 30 days in every 120 years; but the Chaldeans, Romans, and also the Syrians, who added one day every four years, all appear to have derived their solar year of 365 days 6 hours from the Egyptians. This analogy led M. Jouard to suppose the Mexicans also borrowed their measure from the Egyptians, or that both had a common origin. The same writer also shows that the sign of the "balance" existed in the Egyptian Zodiac long previous to the Roman conquest, and that the same sign is found among the sculptured antiquities at Elephanta, and also in the "lunar houses" of the Peruvians; and also mentions what he considers a significant fact, that Cipactli, the first sign of the days in the Mexican calendar corresponds with Capricorn the first sign of the Zodiac in the Egyptian designation.

R. G. Haliburton also finds from an exhaustive inquiry into the literature and traditions of primitive nations that there existed a common and universal system of chronology based upon the Pleiades -- the year beginning on that night when the Pleiades are "above" or "are more distinct," that is to say: when they cross the meridian at midnight. The traces of this ancient knowledge, he finds in the various festivals and periodic customs of ancient peoples.

Among the Egyptians, the festival of Isia bore a singular resemblance to that of the cycle among the Mexicans. According to the Egyptian belief, when the sun descended toward Capricorn and the days gradually diminished they feared it was about to leave them forever, whereupon they put on mourning and the appearance of sadness. When the great luminary began to mount higher toward the zenith and the days were lengthened, they put on white robes and flowers amid great rejoicing. The Mexican festival took place on the five unassigned days of the year preceding the thirteen intercalary days during which they put on the appearance of deepest distress and fear. All household vessels and precious articles were broken, fires were extinguished, and the entire population gave themselves up to lamentation as if the end of the world were at hand. In the evening of the last day began the Festival of the New Fire. The priests followed by immense crowds ascended a sacred mountain, and there, when the Pleiades mounted to the zenith, the sacred fire was kindled in the pile whereon a human victim lay. As the flames ascended, joyful acclamations rent the air, repeated far and wide by watchers on housetops and teocallis, and the new fire was distributed from temple to temple by fleet messengers and thence to

private dwellings. When the sun reappeared, the acclamations were renewed and the people, assured of a new lease of the earth for another cycle repaired to their homes to spend the intercalary days in renewing and purifying their households and in rejoicing and congratulation. Concerning these singular customs Mr. Haliburton says: *"We turn now to Mexico and there find that the great festival of the Mexican Cycle was held on the 17th of November, and was regulated by the Pleiades. It began at sunset, and at midnight as that constellation approached the zenith, a human victim was offered up to avert the dread calamity which they believed impended over the human race. This belief was so remarkable that I can not omit a reference to it here. They had a tradition that at that time the world had been previously destroyed, and they dreaded lest a similar catastrophe would at the end of a cycle annihilate the human race. Now it is most remarkable to find that the Egyptians with their Isia or new year's festival of agriculture, and of the dead, that took place on the 17th day of November, associated traditions as to the deluge."* The subsequent confusion in computations of time, among the Egyptians he attributes to the later custom of observing the heliacal risings and settings of Sirius Sothis or the great Dog Star.

In summing up, Mr. Haliburton concludes that the Pleiades year, and probably the human race, too, originated in the isles of the Southern Ocean and spread thence by ship to more northerly regions. He traces the same festival and the Pleiades year among the ancient inhabitants of Persia, India, Egypt, Peru, Australia, Society Islands,

Ceylon, Polynesia, and refers our observance of "Hallow-eve" to the same source. Humboldt, on the other hand, attributes these analogies of religious belief and observances to the natural tendency of superstitious ideas among all nations to assume the same form at the rise and fall of civilization.

In thus stating some of the points wherein coincidences exist in the ancient American and oriental civilizations, which, in connection with the Atlantic tradition are claimed to establish a ground for inferring a communication at some very early period in the world's history, though much is omitted for the sake of brevity, enough is apparent to show that the subject is, in the present state of our knowledge, incapable of very definite discussion.

Investigators are by no means agreed as to the value of the evidences subject to examination. It must be admitted, however, that it is not easy to find a satisfactory reason for these analogies in the conditions of developmont [development] it of the two races; for in this view we might

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expect to find no greater resemblance than is common between other nations similarly situated. Common features may, it is true, be observed in the social and religious systems of many ancient peoples, and it might be said that these do not per se prove a community of origin. But the resemblances between the Mexican and Egyptian systems, it is claimed, are of a peculiar character, readily distinguishable from those common to other nations. The division of the people into castes; their special knowledge of astronomy; the erection of pyramids and temples for worship and sepulchre; belief in the transmigration of souls; together with many other striking resemblances in religion and arts, it is maintained, can hardly be referred to a coincidental development of races--one a race of mountaineers, isolated so far as we can ascertain, from all exterior influences by great ocean barriers; the other, residents of alluvial plains, in the immediate neighborhood of other and distinct races, possessing capacities for elevation which at an early day produced civilizations which awed the world.

A further fact is asserted by Brasseur de Bourbourg: that among the early Mexican nations, there was a lingering tradition of a great cataclysm, such as mentioned by Plato, in which many of their ancestors were destroyed by a great wave which rolled up from the Atlantic to the base of the mountains, overwhelming all within its reach. A violent subsidence of extensive areas of land, accompanied by earthquakes, ensued, of which the Bahama Islands, Greater and Lesser Antilles, and Carribbee Islands, are but the higher elevations projecting above the water. It is to be feared, that the enthusiastic Abbe, has stated the case too strongly. The reference to a deluge, is a tradition which the Aztecs possessed in common with nearly all the Indian tribes of North America, which many bibliologists have supposed to be a lingering remnant of the Semitic traditions, prevalent on the plains of Asia; and their traditions of an age of fire, and one of famine, to be, in like manner, a traditional reminiscence of the destruction of the "*cities of the plain*," and of the famine "*which was upon all lands*," when Joseph, the Israelite, served the Egyptian Pharaoh.

Catlin says of the Mandan tribe, on the upper Missouri, that they held a yearly celebration in honor of the preservation of their great ancestor from the flood in a big canoe, a symbol of which was erected in the center of their village, and held in great veneration. It is difficult, sometimes, to ascertain just how far statements of this kind are tinged with the prejudices of the observers; and, the worthy Abbe having the Atlantic tradition in his mind, and the enthusiastic Indian artist feeling certain he was among the long lost tribes of Israel, may, both have unconsciously colored the facts to suit their respective theories.

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In the assertion of Brasseur de Bourbourg, however, be true, it would seem to form the complement of the Atlantic tradition and complete a chain of circumstantial evidence of great strength.

The main argument against the tradition, namely: its alleged physical impossibility, is one upon which scientists are not agreed. Sir Charles Lyell treats it as a fact, so far as this is concerned, regarded by the people of that day as a judgment of their supreme deity. After citing the earthquakes of 1822, in South America, which the priests made use of to inveigh against the political revolutions in that country, he says: "*In like manner in the account given to Solon by the Egyptian priests of the submersion of the islands of Atlantis under the waters of the ocean after repeated shocks of an earthquake, we find that the event happened when Jupiter had seen the moral depravity of the inhabitants.*" In this there is no hint of the want of probable truth in the tradition, which would have appeared, had the distinguished geologist considered it as a thing physically impossible.

Several authorities are cited by Brasseur de Bourbourg as supporting the opinion, that the eastern coast of Central America and Mexico once extended far to the eastward, and included the West India and Florida islands, and those lying to the southward as far as the Orinoco river. Among these are Moreau de Saint-Mery ("*Description topographique et politique de la Partie Espagnole de l'Isle de Saint-Domingue,*" 1796), who considers "the innumerable islands situated from the mouth of the Orinoco to the Bahama Channel (islands which include several Grenadins not always visible, in very high tides or great agitations of the sea), to be the tops of the most elevated of a chain of mountains which crowned a portion of the continent, whose submersion has produced the Gulf of Mexico." Mr. Charles Martins (*Revue des Deux Mondes*, March, 1867,) is also quoted as expressing the opinion, that "*hydrography, geology and botany agree in teaching us that the Azores, the Canaries and Madeira are the remains of a great continent which formerly united Europe to North America.*"

Undoubtedly, to accept the theory of a cataclysm such as the tradition of Atlantis requires, we must greatly enlarge the commonly received theological view of man's antiquity. But the universal tendency of modern investigation is to prove the antiquity of the human race to be far greater than we can yet conceive. That America forms no exception to this statement is freely admitted by Bancroft, who also intimates his belief that there once existed in tropical America a much higher state of civilization which had temporarily deteriorated at the time of the Spanish conquest.

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Without pursuing further the speculations which the tradition suggests, we may conclude by suggesting that while the Atlantic theory is not, in the present state of our knowledge "*so preeminently well founded as to be generally accepted by scientific men,*" yet, in view of all the facts, no clue which has been offered, as leading to a satisfactory explanation of the aboriginal civilization of this continent, seems to promise more interesting results than this. While Professor Owen and other Egyptologists already trace the original Egyptian culture to a people far different from those known to us as Egyptians a race closely resembling the Australian type -- we recognise in our own archaeology, also, the traces of a foreign influence, exerted at remote periods consistent at least with the explanation afforded by the Atlantic tradition.